DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 424 859 IR 057 224

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TITLE A Study of Audiobook Users at the Salem, Ohio Public Library.
PUB DATE 1998-07-00
NOTE 43p.; Master's Research Paper, Kent State University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiotape Recordings; Books; Individual Characteristics; *Library Circulation; Library Collection Development; Library Collections; Library Research; Media Selection; Profiles; *Public Libraries; Questionnaires; Tables (Data); *Talking Books; Use Studies; User Needs (Information); *Users (Information)
IDENTIFIERS Ohio; *User Characteristics; User Preferences

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study in which data on audiobook borrowers' backgrounds, borrowing practices, and desires were collected, in order to assist library staff in making informed collection development decisions and being responsive to patron needs. Participants were patrons of the Salem Public Library (Ohio). An anonymous questionnaire was used to build personal profiles of patrons and their audiobook borrowing practices. Findings indicated that patrons prefer unabridged audiobooks; place little importance on an actor or actress reading a book; and check titles out primarily based upon the subject. In addition, a significant number of audiobook borrowers never use the print area of the library. Almost as many patrons primarily listen to audiobooks at home as listen while driving to work or driving a vehicle as a main part of their occupation. Ten tables present data on: preference for abridged/unabridged edition, age range of respondents, activities while listening, educational level of respondents, genre preferred, importance of actor/actress as reader, number of audiobooks borrowed, number of print books borrowed, reason for selecting an audiobook, and sex of respondent. The questionnaire and cover letter are appended. (DLS)

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ED 424 859

A STUDY OF AUDIOBOOK USERS AT THE SALEM, OHIO PUBLIC LIBRARY

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

John Yingling

July, 1998

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ABSTRACT

With audiobooks becoming a larger part of a public library's collection, more data as to patrons' backrounds, borrowing practices and desires is needed. This way, the library can make informed collection development decisions and be responsive to patron needs.

In the case of the Salem Public Library, an anonymous questionnaire was used to ascertain not only a personal profile of each patron, but also of his or her audiobook borrowing practices.

At the end of one month, the surveys were collected and analyzed. Some major findings were that most patrons preferred unabridged audiobooks, they placed little importance on an actor or actress reading a book, and that the subject of the audiobook was the primary reason most patrons checked out a title. In addition, a significant number never used the print area of the library. And, almost as many patrons primarily listened to audiobooks at home as did those who drove to work or drove a vehicle as a main part of their occupation.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Backround

Audiobooks (or talking books) were an almost nonexistent item in retail stores and in libraries as recently as 1974. By 1994, however, the audiobook industry had grown to a more than $1 billion a year business.[1] The list of titles had increased from 11,500 in 1986, to 60,000 in 1994.[2] Talking books have become the fastest growing item (along with videocassettes) in many public libraries' collections.[3] Because of the demand, one audio producer has increased the number of titles it releases to over 300 per year.[4] Public libraries, meanwhile, had increased their budgets annually to meet the demand for audiobooks through the 1980s.[5] In the 1990s, fewer libraries increased their budgets, but audio had by then become a significant part of an average public library's budget.

Why has the audiobook become more and more popular in libraries? With many people making fairly lengthy drives to work, a great need has developed for something worthwhile to fill the commuting times. As a result, the commuter has become the number one user of audiobooks.[6] People in general, too, seem to have less and less time on their hands, but still the desire to read, since listening while doing housework or gardening or walking garners a significant amount of audiobook users. In addition,

audiobooks may be the best or only source of reading enjoyment by the visually impaired or nonreaders.[7]

Among librarians and producers, the debate has gone on and will continue to go on about whether to manufacture, buy or listen to abridged or unabridged books on tape. The cost to manufacture or buy an audiobook is relatively high, so oftentimes the sole source for a person desiring the complete book on tape is the public library (renting an audiobook from a company or store can also be fairly costly).[8] Purists believe abridging a book destroys the integrity of the work and that, particularly in the case of the classics of literature, books were meant to be read in their entirety. On the other hand, some listeners prefer the essentials of the storyline of a book, and the two and one-half to three hour length of many abridged books fits in well with their time demands (especially those of a commuter).[9] The debate has continued unresolved, but the consensus seems to be that a particular library's collection should effect a balance between the two, yet at the same time be responsive to the community's preferences.[10]

Perhaps the most effective way to accomplish this is through patron surveys. Through a survey, a library can determine whether patrons prefer abridged or unabridged audiobooks, if the typical listener uses other parts of the library, and just what genres of audiobooks are the most appealing to them. A survey can also provide a picture of the audiobook clientele: their ages, educational backround, sex, and whether they are light or heavy users of audiobooks. Through surveys, a library can make

purchasing decisions more in line with what the community members want, not just those in the majority, but also those who enjoy less popular kinds of audiobooks. However, not a great deal of information as to survey results in public libraries has been published to date. There are audio producers and retail businesses that have surveyed their customers.[11] From the results of these various surveys, a library could prepare a fairly detailed questionnaire to ascertain the needs of its patron base.

Cassette tapes are a convenient, easy way to listen to a book, either in the home or on the road. However, with the ease comes several drawbacks: first, the average lifespan of an audiobook is approximately five years, limiting its shelflife.[12] Second, cassette tapes are fairly fragile and have a tendency, after heavy use, to stretch and break, therefore causing a problem not just for the user (whose tape player could be affected by the broken tape, as well as the delay or interruption in listening), but also for the library, which must repair or replace the tape. Fortunately, in this respect, most vendors have well-established replacement policies.[13] Third, tapes can be lost or, worse, stolen.

Another point to consider is that the library carrying books on tape may bring into the building people who might ordinarily never use a library. If an audiobook collection does not have its own separate room, the library might well use the retail concept and place the collection near part of the print area or in the rear of the building, thereby giving people the chance to at

least see what else the library has to offer.[14]

Although books on cassette tapes may eventually be replaced by books on compact discs or in another electronic form, books in versions other than print will no doubt remain an integral part of a library's collection. As such, the budgeting for them deserves careful consideration, as does determining the needs and preferences of the patrons.

Purpose of the Study

The Salem Public Library has an annual audio/video circulation of 119,810, according to its Internet Web page (www.salemohio.com/library/). These figures are for 1996.

The purpose of this study is to provide a profile of audiobook users at the library in two areas: one, a personal profile of the patron, and two, a profile of the user's audiobook tastes and preferences. The latter would determine whether the person uses other parts of the library--specifically the book area. These results can help provide a more up-to-date, detailed view of audiobook users at a medium-sized public library.

Definition of Terms

Audiobook-- a cassette tape recording of a book read usually by one person, but sometimes by two or more people. No compact discs

or vinyl recordings are considered.

Abridged-- an edited version of a printed book that is on cassette. An abridgment is not always done by the author, but almost always is approved by the author.

Unabridged-- the complete version of a printed book that is on cassette, with no words or sections left out.

Limitations of the Study

This questionnaire was completed by audiobook users who are registered patrons of the Salem Public Library. Therefore, the findings do not necessarily generalize to all library patrons in all library settings. It must be added that no racial or ethnic backround questions were asked in any researched surveys, so this data must be assumed to be irrelevant. In addition, a question about a person's annual income was left out, since a person with a college degree or post-graduate degree may be underemployed at a low salary. And, marital status/family status questions were not asked, as being irrelevant and too intrusive. Finally, this study included only subjects who agreed to answer the questionnaire, and it is not known whether or not they represent a broad sample.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many politicians and businesses use surveys to determine what people are thinking and how best to serve them. For the same reasons, surveys are a valuable tool for libraries.

The Audio Publishers Association (APA) conducted two nationwide surveys during the 1990s. While, obviously, publishers are in the business of selling (or renting) audiotapes, the results were useful. The most important reason for looking closely at these results is that the surveys discovered that about half of the people who listen to audiobooks get their tapes primarily from a public library.[15] The surveys also found that the percentage of users who primarily listen while driving reached 55% by 1995,[16] and that the most important reason for selecting a tape was the subject matter (71% of respondents chose this reason in the 1995 survey).[17] The most popular category was religious/inspirational; more users were in their 40s than any other age group; and the vast majority of both men and women users had at least attended college.[18] In a result surprising to this researcher, Harlequin books, a publisher of romance novels, found that 70% of the listeners to their audiobooks are college-educated.[19] Approximately two-thirds of the respondents to the APA surveys were women and almost half of the people answering the survey listened to between one and five hours of audiobooks each week.[20]

A study done by an audiobook store in Houston, Texas

revealed basically three kinds of audiobook listeners: one, avid readers who use audio to accomplish more "reading," two, busy people who do not have the time to read as much as they would like and who want to be more well-rounded, and three, those who listen for education or inspiration. Publishers Weekly showed that sales of audiobooks had increased dramatically between 1990 and 1991 (a 50% increase), and a smaller percentage (14%) between 1991 and 1992, increasing yet again (17.7%) between 1993 and 1994.[21] Other businesses reported newer classes of audiobook listeners: data entry workers who listen to books while on the job, and airplane passengers.[22]

Since about half of the people surveyed by the APA get their audiobooks primarily at the library, the question becomes: how do the results compare with various libraries surveyed? As early as 1986 a survey by Library Journal revealed that audiobooks (along with videos) had become the most popular part of the average library's collection, and were responsible for the biggest part of increases in circulation figures.[23] A year earlier, a survey by the same magazine found that commuters were the number one users of audiobooks (although academic libraries as well as public libraries were included in the poll). This particular study also discovered that all surveyed libraries were increasing their audiobook budgets for the fiscal year 1986, and that foreign language instruction was the most popular category.[24]

By 1987, in its third survey, Library Journal revealed that almost all libraries (again a combination of academic and public) were increasing their audiobook budgets. At this point, Library

Journal began to make its surveys a little more detailed (or at least were reporting more statistics) and found that 80% of the libraries lent audio for free. The most significant statistic in this survey was that 70% of the responding libraries reported that patrons who borrowed audio and/or video also used other library materials.[25] However, there is one important omission in these three annual surveys: no statistics were reported as to which format, abridged or unabridged, libraries were buying or patrons were using. Either Library Journal investigators felt the question was not important enough to ask, or they did ask the question and believed the findings to be not significant enough to report.

It was not until a 1990 survey (reported in 1991) that the abridged-unabridged debate was discussed within the context of a survey. This report revealed that 37.6% of responding libraries had the majority of their patrons preferring unabridged, while 32.2% reported that the majority preferred abridged audiobooks. Cost, too, of unabridged was discovered to be a factor, since a little over 50% of the libraries responding said that the high price of unabridged audiobooks prevented them from buying as much as they would like. Returning to earlier-asked questions, Library Journal found that commuters were still the number one users of audiobooks but, significantly, only 30% of the libraries were planning to increase their audiobook budgets for fiscal year 1991.[26] Obviously, by the early 1990s budgets had become tighter for those libraries, but, taking a positive view, almost one-third still found room for more audiobook dollars, implying that

this part of the collection was popular enough to justify the increased expenditure.

A 1991 survey by Cahner's Research delved into two previously unreported areas when it found that 4.2% of public libraries purchased only unabridged audiobooks, while 55% of replying librarians said that the reader (or performer) of an audiobook was an important factor in their buying decision.[27] This latter statistic is at odds with a Publishers Weekly survey in 1995 which revealed that barely over 1% of audiobook buyers considered the reader to be a significant factor.[28]

The abridged-unabridged debate was discussed at greater length by Kaye and Baxter who argued that abridged is oftentimes preferable, because one, its cost to the library is low; two, patrons demand it; and three, the shorter length is in line with driving times of many commuters. In addition, they assert that the attractive packaging and the fact that an abridgment may be the only available audio treatment of a book makes it appropriate for the library to buy and the patron to listen to. On the other hand, they discuss several points in favor of unabridged audiobooks: one, that patrons demand them (again reinforcing the closeness of the numbers between abridged and unabridged aficionados); two, most unabridged books on tape have sturdier packaging, and therefore a longer shelf life; three, it is easier to get lost or damaged tapes replaced; and four, unabridged preserves the integrity of the author's work and is line with the library's belief in offering the complete volume.[29]

Fakih agrees that patron feedback is vital in determining

how much of each format a library will carry. She also agrees with Kaye and Baxter in that unabridged is preferred by some because it reflects the total work of the author. She further asserts that because unabridged is expensive, the average person cannot afford to buy it. Therefore, the library is the sole source for this format to the patron. She concurs, in a sense, with Kaye and Baxter too, that abridged is popular because people are in a hurry and they want the essential plot and charactors.[30]

McGrath looks at abridgments and acknowledges there is a debate about whether audiobooks and, more specifically, abridgments are bad because the listener does no actual reading and at that hears only a portion of the book. Conversely, she argues that they are good because it is an incentive for younger people and busy adults to use the library, to continue learning and, perhaps, to read the book after listening to a condensed version of it (or at least read different books).[31]

Hoffman agrees with this last point of McGrath's about the good aspects of audiobooks and further contends that people will listen to genres and to authors that they would never ordinarily read. He states that many abridged versions add sound effects and music, which increases the listener's enjoyment. He also comments that an abridgment may actually be an improvement over a very long book. Nevertheless, he feels that abridged audiobooks are transitional and that, through attrition, will disappear and be replaced by all unabridged audio on library shelves (although he does not provide any ways for libraries to pay for this more expensive format). Contrary to the belief by some that only lazy

readers or those with poor reading habits and/or skills listen to audio, Hoffman asserts that listening is a demanding process. He believes it takes great concentration to keep in mind the various characters, situations and plot developments. If you do not, it is harder to rewind a tape to the exact position where you became confused, than it is to thumb back to a page in a book and reread.[32]

A Library Journal profile of Books On Tape (BOT), one of the largest producers of unabridged audiobooks, was useful for several reasons. One, BOT produces over 300 titles each year, reflecting the demand for unabridged audiobooks. Two, it uses only nondramatic readings (no celebrity readers, melodramatic or interpretive readings), which reflects the nonimportance given by most listeners for readers or reading styles. Third, the fact that 37% of BOT's sales are to libraries reinforces the point that a significant number of libraries need unabridged audio and are making room in their budgets for it (again, reflecting patron demand). A fourth aspect to note is that all of BOT's titles are always available, unlike books which go out of print. A final important point of the article is the brief history of BOT, which shows the relatively recent growth of audiobooks, since, in 1974, very few audiobooks were available anywhere.[33]

Actual profiles of audiobook users must be gleaned from several sources, since no detailed, comprehensive report of an individual library's patrons was published by anyone that this researcher could find (some may very well have been completed, but they were not reported in a national library publication).

From the bits and pieces that were found, some comments can be made.

Harris sees the basic user as one who is engaged in a physical activity (driving, gardening, doing housework, etc.) that allows his or her brain to remain free for listening.[34] Jones and Seim note that patron surveys reveal that their library's patrons prefer fiction, especially mystery and suspense, and that the patrons are evenly divided as to abridged or unabridged preference. However, they included no other specifics of their survey results.[35] Holovack agrees with Jones and Seim about the abridged/unabridged debate among patrons, but provides no numbers. She noted that audiobooks are "highly popular" with joggers and walkers and among visually impaired patrons but, again, provides no numbers to back up her assertions.[36] Sippen writes that at one public library, 60% of the audiobook users are truck drivers and, at another, commuters are the number one users.[37]

Publishers and retail businesses are the best sources for statistics as to exactly who are the people using audiobooks, and what their tastes are. Surveys taken two years apart in the earlier years of this decade agree that commuters are the foremost users of audiobooks (slightly over 50% of users), while listening at home is the favorite activity for 33% of the listeners. "Most" of the users are in their 40s, while the percentage of listeners who have at least attended college had grown in the two year interval (from both sexes). Subject matter clearly remains the most important reason for a person selecting

an audiobook, with author reputation the next most popular factor. Religious/inspirational is the most popular subject category. More than 80% of the respondents in one survey consider a famous-named reader an unimportant issue. In this later survey too, it is found that the percentage of listeners who are women had grown from 58% to 69% in the two years.[38] As noted earlier, although businesses created and took these surveys, around half of the respondents report that they primarily use the library to get audiobooks. Therefore, since public library-generated audiobook user survey statistics are so inadequate, these business survey reports can at least be the basis for developing a questionnaire to be given to audiobook patrons at a public library.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The research design utilized the survey method. The survey instrument consisted of ten questions, which provided a brief profile of the patron (age range, sex, education level) and a delineation of his or her listening preferences and habits (unabridged or abridged, genre preferred, borrowing habits, reason for listening to an audiobook--see Appendix A).

The method of collection consisted of the librarians in the audio-visual department of the Salem Public Library asking patrons who checked out audiobooks to complete the questionnaire. A cover letter was attached to the box to which the questionnaires were returned (see Appendix B). The cover letter mentioned that the results would be shared with respondents if they so desired since this helps increase response rate.[39] No minors were included in the survey. The questionnaire was either one of two colors, green or yellow, because research has shown that surveys using colored papers produce a higher response rate than surveys using black ink on white paper.[40]

The questionnaire was left in the library for approximately one month. The data were evaluated by comparing the results with earlier surveys done by libraries and businesses as detailed in the Literature Review. Limitations of the work were listed in the Introduction.

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS

The abridged-unabridged debate was clearly decided in favor of unabridged by Salem Public Library users. The percentage who prefer unabridged, 73.3% (see Table 1), is higher than the results of any other survey found by this researcher. One reason may be that since the majority of listeners are over 40 (see Table 2), they are used to reading complete books (since they grew up before the advent of audiobooks) and prefer the whole product. In addition, because over 80% of users are either driving or at home when they listen to an audiobook (see Table 3), they are engaged in pursuits that are time-consuming and mundane and therefore are amenable to longer audiobooks. And, over 64% have had at least some college training (see Table 4), so they are used to doing a lot of reading and again prefer the complete work. Finally, because of high cost of unabridged audiobooks, the people who favor this version find that the library is their sole source.

Table 1.---Preference for Audiobook Edition

Edition	f	%
Abridged	20	26.7
Unabridged	55	73.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 2.--Age Range of Respondent

Age Range	f	%
18-19	2	2.7
20-29	11	14.7
30-39	10	13.3
40-49	17	22.7
50-59	18	24.0
60-69	10	13.3
70-79	4	5.3
80-89	3	4.0
90-99	0	0.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 3.--Activity While Listening

Activity	f	%
Walking/Jogging	7	9.3
Doing Housework	11	14.7
Riding a bus, train, plane, etc.	2	2.7
Relaxing at home	12	16.0
Driving to and from your job	22	29.4
Gardening	1	1.3
Vacation or leisure driving	4	5.3
Listening while at work	5	6.7
Driving as main part of your job	9	12.0
(Other) Playing video games	1	1.3
Sewing	1	1.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.--Education Level of Respondent

Education Level	f	%
Some high school	3	4.0
High school graduate	24	32.0
Some college	22	29.3
College graduate	26	34.7
Total	75	100.0

Question number two asked which genre the patron preferred. Since "General Fiction" was chosen by the most people, 36.0%, (see Table 5) it can be assumed that these readers are not tied to one particular genre, but would rather dabble in different areas of fiction. However, 32.0% specifically preferred suspense or mystery audiobooks. One reason for this may be that, well-written and exciting as they may be, mystery and suspense novels are, generally speaking, relatively straightforward narratives (this researcher has listened to a great many mystery/suspense novels over the last three years). Since the majority of respondents to this survey have some college backround, they are used to reading either technical or otherwise sophisticated material, and favor listening to a book that is more pleasurable and relaxing. Obviously, the respondents do not feel that classics of literature are more desirable than other genres, since only two persons preferred listening to them. History, biography and nonfiction combined gathered only 13.3% of respondents votes, which seems to reflect people's need to escape the real world via a work of fiction.

Table 5.--Genre Preferred

Genre	f	%
Motivational/Inspirational	3	4.0
Classics of literature	2	2.7
Biography	4	5.3
History	2	2.7
Nonfiction	4	5.3
Suspense/Mystery	24	32.0
Science Fiction	4	5.3
Westerns	0	0.0
Romance	2	2.7

Table 5--Continued

Genre	f	%
Learning a language	0	0.0
Humor	3	4.0
General Fiction	27	36.0
Total	75	100.0

The results of question number three confirmed one consensus of earlier studies in that people who drive to and from work constitute the largest number of listeners (29.4%). If people who drive as a main part of their job are included, the number increases to 41.4% (see table 3). The next largest group as determined by this survey is that of people who most often listen while they are at home (this includes people doing housework, relaxing, gardening or, in this study, sewing or playing video games). This number is 34.6%. While motor vehicle drivers are helping themselves pass the monotony of driving times, some of the at-home listeners are accomplishing some task or tasks. The people who simply relax and listen at an audiobook may very well be increasing the quality of their free time. These results compare favorably with two studies, done in 1993 and 1995, by the Audio Publishers Association (APA).[41]

Question number four dealt with the importance of a celebrity reading an audiobook. Clearly, it is not significant to the vast majority of respondents (see Table 6). However, the 20% who do feel it is important for an actor or an actress to read a book is a much higher percentage than that found in the APA survey done in 1995.[42]

Table 6.--Importance of Actor/Actress as Reader

Response	f	%
Yes	15	20.0
No	60	80.0
Total	75	100.0

The fifth question asked how many audiobooks a borrower checked out each month. For purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that people who borrow one to five audiobooks per month are light listeners, patrons who check out six to ten audiobooks are average listeners, and patrons who borrow eleven or more audiobooks are heavy listeners. This presupposes most audiobooks borrowed are unabridged, based on the results of question number one (see Table 1). An unabridged audiobook can run anywhere from four to as many as fifteen-plus hours. Of course, a listener may be borrowing abridged titles if that is the only treatment available. Abridgments generally run from three to six hours long. (A future study, as a follow-up to this question, may ask how many hours per week a person listens to audiobooks.) Light listeners to audiobooks constitute over 40% of respondents, average listeners almost 27%, and heavy listeners total nearly 32% of respondents (see Table 7). Of the twenty four respondents who are considered heavy listeners to audiobooks, 37.5% are either people who drive to and from work or those who drive as a main part of their job. There are no previous studies found by this researcher to compare to these particular findings.

Table 7.--Number of Audiobooks Borrowed

Number of Audiobooks Borrowed	f	%
1	6	8.0
2	8	10.7
3	6	8.0
4	8	10.7
5	3	4.0
6	9	12.0
8	5	6.7
10	6	8.0
12	1	1.3
15	8	10.7
16	2	2.7
20	10	13.3
25	1	1.3
28	1	1.3
48	1	1.3
	Total 75	100.0

Question six asked about the hardback/paperback borrowing usage of audiobook listeners. The largest number of respondents, 36%, do not borrow any printed books at all (see Table 8). Further study revealed that of this number, 18.6% are considered light listeners to audiobooks, 33.3% are average listeners, and 48.1% are heavy listeners. The overwhelming majority of people who never borrow printed books, then, do check out six or more audiobooks every month. Possible follow-up questions could ask why these listeners do not borrow printed versions of books, and whether they use any other part of the library, such as the reference department or the public access computers. For the purposes of this study, it will be assumed that a person who borrows up to four books a month (up to a book read each week) is a light user, one who borrows from five to eight books per month

(up to two books read each week) is an average user, and one who borrows nine or more books per month is a heavy user. Therefore, 73.4% of audiobook users are light users of print books, 10.6% are average users, and 16% are heavy users. While the amount of audiobooks borrowed is closely distributed among light, average and heavy listeners, among the same patrons nearly three-fourths borrow either no print books or very few per month. It must be added that, although this large number rarely if ever borrows print versions of books, they are not necessarily virtual nonreaders. They may very well be readers of newspapers, magazines, or have books they have purchased or otherwise own that they read. This could be another question for a future study: how much reading do these people do each each week (or month)?

Table 8.--Number of Print Books Borrowed

Number of Books Borrowed	f	%
0	27	36.0
1	6	8.0
2	11	14.7
3	7	9.4
4	4	5.3
5	4	5.3
6	3	4.0
7	1	1.3
10	9	12.0
15	2	2.7
20	1	1.3
Total	75	100.0

The seventh question asked the most important reason a borrower had for choosing an audiobook. The results to this question mirrored those found in earlier studies: that the subject is the most important reason a person usually has for choosing an audiobook (62.7% of respondents chose this category). The second largest group consisted of the 13.3% who say that the author is most important in their decision to choose an audiobook. Only 4% said that the person who reads the book most influences their choice (see Table 9). Based upon the results of question number four (celebrity status of the reader), most of those who felt that an actor or an actress as a reader of a book to be an important factor did not feel that it was the most important reason they had for choosing a particular audiobook. However, this is not what Doubleday's Audiobooks Direct Club found in their survey of it's customers.[43]

Table 9.--Reason for Selecting an Audiobook

Reason	f	%
Subject	47	62.7
Person who reads it	3	4.0
Title	8	10.7
Author	10	13.3
Cover design	1	1.3
(Other) To pass the time	1	1.3
Likes to listen to them	1	1.3
Can listen when not able to be reading	2	2.7
Convenience	1	1.3
Self-help	1	1.3
Total	75	99.9

The age range of each respondent was asked by question number eight. Adults from 18-39 years old comprise 30.7% of those answering the survey. Early to late middle-aged patrons (40-59 years old) make up the highest number of respondents at over 46%, and senior citizens (age 60 and older) constitute nearly 23% of the rest (see Table 2). That more respondents are in the early to late middle-age range than any other category follows similar outcomes from the APA surveys taken in 1993 and 1995.[44]

The sex of the respondent was asked for question number nine. The 56% of patrons answering the survey who are women (see Table 10) is a smaller percentage than what was found in the APA survey of 1995.[45]

Table 10.--Sex of Respondent

Sex	f	%
Male	33	44.0
Female	42	56.0
Total	75	100.0

The final question asked the highest level of education attained by the person answering the survey. Nearly all (96%) have at least graduated from high school, while 64% have had at least some college experience (see Table 4). A further breakdown shows that 31% of the females and over 39% of the males are college graduates, a little over 26% of the females and more than

33% of the males have some college experience, while over 24% of the males and over 38% of the females are high school graduates. The figures for college graduates and those who have attended college are lower than the percentages found in the APA survey done in 1993 and their follow-up study in 1995, by six to twenty one percentage points.[46]

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Audiobooks clearly are a fast-growing and therefore important part of a public library's collection. There are several related aspects that must be addressed. One is whether a library should buy only unabridged audiobooks, abridged versions, or a combination of both. Another is what genres to buy. A third is what most motivates a patron to check out an audiobook. A fourth consideration is the importance of a celebrity reader in the decision a patron makes to borrow a specific audiobook. Borrowing frequency among patrons, not just of audiobooks, but of print material, helps a library to see whether a patron is using all or part of the facility.

A profile of audiobook users enables a library to see a clearer picture of the borrower. Specifically, the person's age, educational backround, sex, and what he or she is doing while listening can help the library to make informed decisions as to what audiobooks to buy.

A good way to ascertain these objectives is through the use of patron surveys. In the specific case of the Salem, Ohio, public library, patrons who checked out audiobooks were asked to complete a ten-question survey. The results were that, by overwhelming margins, the patrons preferred unabridged audiobooks, and based their decision to borrow on what the subject of the book was. The favorite genre was general fiction, with the particular category of suspense or mystery novels

finishing second. The largest single group of listeners were commuters, but people who listened at home while engaged in various activities, or the nonactivity of relaxing, in combining their numbers, constituted a significant group as well. Most people did not place much importance on whether an actress or an actor read a book.

Borrowing frequency among patrons found a fairly even distribution among light, average, and heavy borrowers of audiobooks. However, this changed when borrowing frequency in the print area was concerned. The largest single group did not borrow any printed books at all. Only a shade over one-fourth of audiobook patrons are either average or heavy borrowers of printed books.

Female borrowers slightly outnumber males, and more borrowers are in the early to late middle age range (40-59) than either the group under age 40, or those 60 or older. In the area of education, a majority have some college experience or have graduated from a college or university.

This survey attempted to provide a more comprehensive study of audiobook users than previously published surveys. Some follow-up or more in-depth questions are left for future studies. Possible categories of inquiry are: one, the occupation of the user; two why they do or do not use the print area of the library; and three, whether the patron has ever purchased an audiobook, and if so, how many and whether it (or they) were abridged or unabridged. (Since unabridged audiobooks are relatively expensive to purchase or to rent, this may account for

the large number of Salem Public Library respondents to this survey who prefer borrowing unabridged audiobooks.)

A fourth area that could be studied would be whether those who prefer unabridged audiobooks ever check out abridged versions, since they may want very much to listen to a title, but it is only available in an abridged version. Since some publishers are now producing longer abridgments running six hours instead of the usual three or four, these aficionados of unabridged may be checking out the longer abridgments as an acceptable alternative.[47]

Although some valuable information was derived from this study, more is needed and should be published, for use by other public libraries and as a starting point for further research. The accumulation and dissemination of information about audiobooks can only help public libraries make informed and responsible collection development decisions.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

A Study of Audiobook Users at the Salem, Ohio Public Library

1. Do you prefer to listen to: (Circle one) A. Unabridged books (the complete book) B. Abridged books (a condensed version)

2. What category of audiobooks do you most prefer to listen to? (Circle one)

A. Motivational/Inspirational
B. Classics of literature
C. Biography
D. History
E. Nonfiction
F. Suspense/Mystery
G. Science Fiction
H. Westerns
I. Romance
J. Learning a language
K. Humor
L. Other (please list)_____
M. General Fiction

3. What are you doing most often when you are listening to an audiobook? (Circle one)

A. Walking or jogging
B. Doing housework
C. Riding a bus or other form of transportation
D. Relaxing at home
E. Driving to and from your job
F. Gardening
G. Vacation or leisure driving
H. Listening while at work
I. Driving as a main part of your job (truck driver, etc.)
J. Other (please list)_____

4. Is it important to you if an actor or an actress is the reader of an audiobook? ____ Yes
____ No

5. How many audiobooks do you borrow from the Salem Public Library in a month? _____

6. How many hardback or paperback books do you borrow from the Salem Public Library in a month? ____

7. What is the most important reason you have for listening to an audiobook? (Circle one)
A. The subject
B. The person who reads it
C. The title
D. The author
E. The design of the cover
F. Other (please list)_____

8. Please check the category that includes your age.

__ 18-19	__ 40-49	__ 70-79
__ 20-29	__ 50-59	__ 80-89
__ 30-39	__ 60-69	__ 90-99

9. Are you: __ Female?
__ Male?

10. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
___ some high school
___ high school graduate
___ some college
___ college graduate

Thank you very much for answering this survey. Your help will enable me to complete work on my Master's Degree and will help the Salem Public Library to know more about its audiobook users and what they like. Sincerely,

John Ziegling

APPENDIX B

Cover Letter

School of Library and Information Science
(330) 672-2782
Fax (330) 672-7965
http://www.slis.kent.edu

Kent STATE UNIVERSITY
P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

Re: A Survey of Audiobook Users at the Salem, Ohio Public Library

Dear Salem Public Library patron:

I am a graduate student in the school of Library and Information Science at Kent State University. As part of the requirements for my Master's degree, I am conducting a study about audiobook users. The following questionnaire elicits information that will help me find out what aspects of audiobooks listeners are most interested in and will provide a brief backround of the borrower. The answers will be very useful in giving important information about audiobook listeners that can benefit a public library in providing the kinds of audiobooks people want.
Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, since you will not need to sign your name to the questionnaire; only the researcher will have access to the survey data. There is no penalty if you choose not to fill out the questionnaire. While your cooperation is very important to the success of this study, it is, of course, voluntary. A copy of the results will be available upon request. If you have any further questions, please contact me at 337-8314 or Dr. Lois Buttlar, my research adviser, at (330) 672-2782. If you have any further questions regarding research at Kent State University, you may contact Dr. Thomas Jones at (330) 672-2851.

Thank you very much for your cooperation; it is greatly appreciated.

My address is:

John Yingling
957 East Sixth Street
Salem, Ohio 44460

Sincerely,

John Yingling

Graduate Student

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[22]Kopka, "Good News, Bad News," 29; Kopka, "Audio Use, Bookstore Purchases Rise," 27.

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